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Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: human resources development

Developing human resources for development

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 52/196 of 18 December 1997 on developing human resources for development (HRD), the General Assembly took note of the note of the Secretary-General on the topic and requested the Secretary-General to include in his report to the fifty-fourth session an assessment of the effectiveness of the contribution made by the United Nations system to advance human resources development through its operational activities, and to make recommendations to further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of its contribution to human resources development, including the identification of possible new approaches that would enhance their impact.

2. The present report has been prepared pursuant to the above resolution and seeks to be forward-looking. This report examines the challenges and constraints that have beset the development of human resources, including the Asian economic and financial crisis and its impact on countries everywhere. The report then focuses on the identification of possible new approaches to developing HRD.

Constraints and challenges facing human resources development

3. The Asian economic and financial crisis has served to highlight the new realities countries face at the dawn of the new millennium. These new realities hold both great promise and great risks and pose extraordinary challenges to human resource development in the usual sense. Globalization of economic and other forces, the information revolution and rapid change on all fronts make all countries vulnerable to recurring crises and shocks. As the hub of the new network economy where productivity is driven by human intelligence aided by information and communication technology, the Internet is at the centre of this. It is therefore opportune to examine some of the implications of these new perspectives for human resources development for development.

4. The crisis has also served to forge a realization that new approaches are required. Recognizing the limitations of approaches that centre on economic and financial policies only, increasingly the international community is moving towards a new paradigm which sees development as transformation of the whole society. Such a holistic approach to human development now provides a much broader and sounder foundation for closer cooperation between, *inter alia*, the United Nations system and the World Bank (and other Bretton Woods institutions), and this has been encouraged by the General Assembly for many years. Such closer collaboration among international development agencies is particularly important in the areas of human resources development and capacity-building, as a recent report by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has underlined.[1] The Economic and Social Council, in reviewing operational

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activities, adopted resolution 1999/5 of 23 July 1999 in which the Council called on the United Nations system to continue to increase support and to improve collaboration, effectiveness, responsiveness and flexibility in its support for poverty alleviation and capacity-building, when addressing specific capacity needs as identified by the recipient countries.

5. The comprehensive approach to human resources development for development outlined in the note of the Secretary-General (A/52/540) is important and remains an overarching priority. Continued investments must be made in all factors of human development such as education and training, health and nutrition to achieve universal coverage, and the well-being of all must remain the overall goal. That note also stressed the importance of sustainable livelihoods and the adoption of HRD strategies that focused on sustainable livelihood skills. Such a focus is of fundamental importance in empowering people to become self-reliant and self-supporting on a sustainable basis within an enabling environment. Another, broader dimension of HRD is capacity development for sustainable human development. This requires a holistic, comprehensive approach that puts people first. It is an issue not just of development *of* people, but of development *by* people *for* people. Human resource development and capacity development for development tend to see people as the objects of programmes and policies and the means or agents of development, the objectives of which are seldom defined with their participation. There is an urgent need in all HRD and capacity development programmes — particularly in education and training programmes — to focus more on the people who are the recipients of the policies and programmes. HRD and capacity development *by* people will focus on the development *of* people as people *for* their own goals and aspirations. This orientation has led many educational reforms — such as student- or learner-centred approaches and community schools — and movements to seek to empower people with the knowledge and information that they need for self-development. When such orientations are given priority, systems and programmes have to become demand-driven and responsive to the diversity and continually changing nature of learning interests, objectives and challenges. Information and telecommunication technologies now make it technically feasible and economically affordable to design such human development systems as meet people's needs in a holistic way and develop their full potentials to contribute to the development of society.

6. The emerging knowledge and information society, which is one of the central features of the globalizing world, affects all countries, North and South. Knowledge and information have become increasingly important factors for production, services, empowerment and a broad range of societal activities — at the global, regional, national and local levels. They affect the international division of labour, determine the competitiveness of corporations and national economies, generate new growth patterns and give rise to new products, services and livelihoods. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are critical, as they offer hitherto untapped potential to generate, access, disseminate and share knowledge and information at all societal levels and to promote lifelong self-learning and development, a learning society and a network economy. Given these characteristics, ICTs can be powerful tools for human development through human resources development, poverty alleviation, promotion of sustainable livelihoods, empowerment of women, youth and the excluded, and strengthening of good governance, and they can enhance sustainable human development in many other ways. ICTs are particularly central to the creation of a learning culture and the transformation of society into a learning, knowledge-based society. One of the major issues that emerge from these developments stems from the fact that, unless explicit policies and strategies are implemented to ensure equitable distribution and universal access, they tend to widen the gap between rich and poor, between city and village, and between centre and periphery. United Nations organizations, particularly the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have sought to encourage policies and approaches that serve to narrow the gaps in connectivity and bring remote and disadvantaged communities into the global networks. The community schools and convergent community action strategies of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are examples of institutional arrangements that simultaneously facilitate the effective use of ICTs and benefit greatly from such use.

New approaches to human resources development

7. One of the most effective ways in which information technologies can be applied to enhance learning is through electronic community centres (ECCs, also called tele-centres and cyber-centres). The centres provide connectivity, and access to information and knowledge, and are central to effective community and family empowerment. They promote and facilitate networking, social communication, dissemination of information and access to official data on government and other programmes from which the

community can benefit. They thus enhance awareness of entitlements and opportunities in education, health, agricultural extension, small business support, social security and other services key to sustainable livelihoods and lifelong learning-by-doing. By linking local communities to the global society, economy and community, the centres create new opportunities for learning, income-earning, growth, livelihoods and jobs, as well as a convenient window on the world which has hitherto been remote and out of reach. These centres are key to bringing the information technology (IT) revolution to remote, unconnected and under-served communities and to empowering them to leapfrog into the information age of the twenty-first century. The centres become the nuclei of a new, more organic learning culture by providing a universal access that is not dependent on the sustainability of elaborate institutional capacities. These centres are thus the building blocks or the nodal points for the transformation to a learning society that is a network of intelligent, learning communities. UNESCO in its "Learning without Frontiers" and other initiatives has promoted this approach in collaboration with ITU and others (http://www.unesco.org).

8. There are many examples of countries that have taken decisive steps towards community empowerment in dealing in strategic ways with the human development challenges of the new realities. Countries are using a variety of innovative strategies and approaches designed to build capacity for leapfrogging the industrial stage of development into the information age. The following selection of cases that demonstrate the trend have been chosen to show that these developments are taking place in all regions, at different speeds and in different forms, and sometimes without the support of the United Nations system.

9. *Jamaica*: The aim of the Government of Jamaica is to provide universal access to IT services in public places throughout the country, such as libraries, schools and post offices. The UNDP Sustainable Development Network Programme (SDNP) is assisting Jamaica in realizing this vision. Starting with a cost-sharing arrangement with one post office, the Jamaica Sustainable Development Network Programme (JSDNP) has established a training facility which will train 100 postal workers per year in IT skills. It also has the capacity to offer training to members of the public and students on a fee-paying basis. JSDNP has been concentrating on providing equipment and training to those who need them most. The goal is to train 150 representatives of non-governmental organizations per year and to establish a network of trainers. The plan is to set up six cyber-centres located in communities at facilities selected with community participation so as to establish local ownership. Three of these will be in libraries and two are already in operation. Staff of the centres are trained to facilitate the Internet access of those who do not know how to effect such access themselves and to help them become familiar with the Internet environment through learning-by-doing. The centres are envisaged as serving the purpose of closing the gap between marginalized groups and communities and the rest of society, and thus also of achieving social integration and inclusiveness (http://sdnhq.undp.org/stories/jamaica.html). Although SDNP was established after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio to support networking in sustainable development issues, the centres tend to respond to the holistic needs of communities, all of which can benefit greatly from universal access to information and knowledge.

10. *Egypt*: In March 1999, Egypt opened three technology access community centres (TACC) in the Governorate of Sharkeya (also called tele-centres). The centres are supported by UNDP as the first in a series of pilot digital projects in all developing regions. These centres represent a unique platform for opening up the entire world to the community through its access to the vast array of information, knowledge and opportunities that the Internet offers. The tele-centre also serves as a training and learning centre for the community, civil society organizations and community-based groups, micro- and small enterprises, and families and individuals. Here they familiarize themselves with IT and learn to use it for a wide variety of applications covering the whole array of dimensions of life. Such applications may encompass distance education and training, telemedicine, electronic commerce, and assistance to micro- and small businesses as well as individual entrepreneurs. They provide new mechanisms for public participation, environmental management, advocacy on public issues, and access to recreational, cultural, social and religious resources for self- and life enhancement, especially the empowerment of women, youth, the elderly and marginalized groups. They also provide the technical and professional interface between the illiterate and unconnected in the community and the information and other resources available on the networks. In addition, they are also designed as hubs for local electronic content creation, especially in the local language, that are appropriate to the local community's culture, needs and interests (http://www.undp.org/info21/pilot/TACC.html).

11. *Thailand*: The Community Empowerment for Response to Crisis Action Plan (CERCAP) was developed by the National Social Policy Committee (NSPC) with support from the United Nations system in Thailand. CERCAP will empower local Thai communities to identify what impacts

the economic crisis has had on the community and to develop a community plan for addressing these impacts. It builds on the holistic people-centred approach of Thailand's Eighth National Social and Economic Development Plan and the provisions of its new Constitution for participatory democracy at the local level. Local community organizations, such as village committees in rural areas and neighbourhood general committees in urban areas, will work together with partners, such as community-based groups, to develop community plans through open, participatory processes. These plans will be funded as close to the local community as possible and then implemented, managed and monitored by the communities themselves. Community capacity to initiate and manage the process will develop through learning-by-doing, with the aim of using all resources, including the community's own, to achieve effective and sustainable results. The CERCAP core teams at the subdistrict, district and province level will organize learning events or undertake learning initiatives to work out solutions to the obstacles reported and will suggest these solutions to the communities. In this way, learning-by-doing will be accelerated and smooth implementation facilitated. Regional Learning Networks led by 13 provinces in the administrative regions of the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Bangkok Metropolitan Area will support the learning processes and share with all provinces the solutions developed, lessons learned and best practices achieved. CERCAP will also develop a model holistic information centre at the subdistrict level that will integrate the information bases of the core ministries with responsibilities for rural development so as to provide access to information and data critical for the analysis and planning of community initiatives. It will train trainers of community empowerment facilitators at the local level who will train enough facilitators to ensure the effectiveness of participatory processes of community decision-making. UNDP is also providing funding for a UNESCO project whose purpose is to make an appropriate model of a Community Learning Centre available to communities and to support those communities that choose to establish such centres in the 14 Regional Learning Networks. CERCAP is a social mobilization campaign with a strategy for presenting awards to communities for successful implementation of the community empowerment processes as well as for results achieved in addressing the impacts of the crisis. Progress will be celebrated on an annual basis, culminating in a national celebration event with awards to the best-performing communities and provinces. UNDP is providing support for the launching of CERCAP and the United Nations system has developed a framework and strategy for the support of CERCAP which is designed as a Web site so as to facilitate continuous adjustment as the process unfolds and responds to community crisis response plans (http://www.un.org.th/CERCAP).

12. *Malaysia*: The National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) and The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) are twin strategies of the Malaysian Government for using IT to achieve its Vision 2020. The strategies are designed to facilitate leapfrogging into the Information Age of the twenty-first century, thereby bypassing the industrial stage of development. NITA aims to transform the nation into a knowledge- and values-based society according to Vision 2020. It focuses on comprehensive human development and envisions the mobilization of the entire nation. It views ICT as a strategic development tool and leverages trisectoral partnership (public, private and civil) as well as top-down and bottom-up planning approaches. At the heart of NITA is civil society bounded by the triangle of people (comprehensive human development), infostructure (foundation of information-age development) and applications (solutions for information-age work and life). MSC is designed to provide a focused test bed for NITA ideas and ideals in an open and special environment for learning-by-doing with ICT. It is intended to provide a platform for NITA in terms of rapid prototyping of ideas and ideals on the development of people, infostructure and content. The strategy for people development includes conditions for creating quality jobs through NITA and MSC, adjusting the education and training systems, and changing the national philosophy of learning and education to one that focuses on providing anyone with access to anything, anywhere and anytime. It aims at developing a workforce with the requisite knowledge and skills for the information age, including the promotion of acculturation programmes and awareness campaigns on opportunities in the information age for the people, while advocating lifelong and flexible learning (http://www.nitc.org.my).

13. *Brazil* has taken several strategic policy steps since 1996 to encourage the rapid development of Internet access across the country. These strategic policy decisions built on the strengths of existing, mostly academic, institutional networks to foster the rapid development of capacity, rapid growth of access and its equitable spread across the country. As a result, Internet hosts grew from 17,429 in 1996 to 215,086 in 1999 and users from 250,000 to 2,200,000 over the same period. Strategies for moving towards the information society must be framed by the involvement of all three sectors (public, private and civil, including the academic), the three layers involved in networks (infrastructure, services and applications) and attention to key developmental vectors (research and development, state-

of-the-art technologies and regulatory requirements). There should be an ensemble of policies ensuring that both the pace of implementation and the adherence to local values and culture are in place. Given the fact that the Internet culture has been established in academic institutions ahead of the commercial sector, a strategic partnership between the private sector and research and education institutions might offer strong advantages in respect of moving towards the information society (http://www.miner.com.br).

14. *South Africa*: The Telecommunications Act of 1996 established a Universal Service Agency (USA) with the vision of promoting universal access and universal service in telecommunications and information for disadvantaged communities so as to facilitate development, empowerment and economic growth. Its main strategy is to support the establishment of tele-centres in disadvantaged communities. So far, 67 such centres have been established. The tele-centres are expected to serve a particular community, not just in telecommunications, but also in such areas as small business support, health, education and training, and other development services. The Agency will work with existing organizations such as schools, libraries, churches, existing community centres and civic organizations in establishing sustainable tele-centres. A survey of 338 multi-purpose community centres in 1996 found that a large proportion already had computers and a surprising number had e-mail access (http://www.usa.org.za). It is sometimes argued that such centres are not priorities for least developed countries and cannot serve effectively the needs of remote, illiterate communities. Yet the SDNP of UNDP is working with 27 countries in Africa (including South Africa) on similar approaches, with the local centres in 4 countries already independent of UNDP funding; 8 others are operational, while the rest are in preparatory stages (http://www.sdnhq.undp.org).

15. *Costa Rica*, in partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), is piloting "Little Intelligent Communities" by setting up unwired "intelligent community centres" in remote villages. They seek to demonstrate that such communities are feasible, affordable and sustainable and can provide universal access to knowledge and information sources and specialized services, such as health, education and financial services. This constitutes an initiative of people in Latin America to empower themselves with the use of IT through the establishment of "digital town centres" in remote villages. The plan is to provide unwired digital community centres to dozens of underdeveloped villages in Central America starting in 1999. The first concrete goal is to design and construct two prototype "digital town centres" in Costa Rica. Unwiring the world can have a huge impact, because it directly addresses the problems of health, educational, economic and cultural opportunity. Unwiring — unlike wired technology — tends to level differences between rich and poor because it works as well in remote regions as in modern cities and is cheap enough to be spread everywhere (http://www.media.mit.edu/unwired).

16. There are also examples from the private sector and civil society. The Global Knowledge Partnership brings together a wide range of institutions from public, private and civil sectors in the common cause of promoting universal access to knowledge in the firm belief that it holds the key to equitable, sustainable human development. The second Global Knowledge Partnership conference is taking place in Kuala Lumpur in March 2000 on the theme: "Building Knowledge Societies: Access — Empowerment — Governance" (http://www.globalknowledge.org). Cisco is a good example of a private sector company that is focusing on networking and e-learning. It has 2,600 networking academies in 47 countries and promotes Internet access and e-learning at all levels of education. Cisco believes that e-learning will be the great equalizer in the next century through universal access's allowing individuals and communities to take charge of their own continuous learning. Cisco is a partner of UNDP in the launching of NetAid (http://www.cisco.com). The National Software Society in India has set up computer access to the Internet in hundreds of villages, providing video communication with relatives in the city and other access services on a fee basis. In Thailand, the 7-11 chain of convenience stores, now counting 1,500 and expanding at a rate of 200 a month, has decided to provide IT services to communities and individuals in all its outlets.

Future directions for human resources development

17. These examples display some common key features and emerging principles. They tend to be societal strategies, seeking to transform the whole society into a learning, knowledge-based society. They seek to provide universal random access to learning opportunities — access by anyone, to anything, anywhere, anytime, anyway. They rely on demand-driven learning-by-doing rather than on costly supply-driven outlays of resources. They empower people and communities to choose their own paths of development, growth, learning and transformation within national frameworks set by visions, values and policies. They aim at leapfrogging into the information age of the twenty-first century, rather than at labouriously gearing up for competition in the industrialized world of the present

century. Some of the principles that guide these approaches are: people first; community empowerment; enabling environment; universal, holistic access; open participatory processes; partnership; quality of being vision-guided; and equity in well-being for all, among others. These principles are key to the development of skill sets and attitudes that are critical not only for success at the global level, but also for sustainable livelihoods and other coping and development strategies at the local level in remote situations.

18. The United Nations system is clearly actively supporting the efforts of developing countries to achieve universal access to ICT learning opportunities. One of the most strategic ways in which it could assist is to support the efforts of developing countries to develop comprehensive national strategies so as to achieve rapid transformation into learning societies, focusing on people development for work and life in all dimensions. An example of this is the regional symposium in Damascus on "Jobs in the Information Society of the 21st Century", supported by UNDP Arab States, which identified a range of initiatives that Arab countries can take to leapfrog into the information age. It identified the need for comprehensive strategies based on access for all, including focus on strong communities within a whole-systems approach, that effectively combine top-down and bottom-up approaches, and aim at comprehensive human development and national wealth creation. Central to such strategies is a national vision of a learning society as a network of intelligent learning communities. At the grass-roots level, this would involve community learning centres (CLCs) in existing facilities such as schools, libraries and post offices that are owned, operated, managed and sustained by communities within an enabling national environment providing universal access to ICT, empowering policies and a learning-friendly regulatory regime. CLCs can facilitate the confluence of energies within the community across all dividing lines as well as from outside to create synergy for both community and individual learning and development.

19. The United Nations system can support country initiatives in creating opportunities for people and communities to leapfrog into the information age. It could develop a global monitoring strategy to record and promote progress in this regard as an integral part of continued concern with and commitment to developing human resources for development. People development, including human resources development and capacity-building, and progress towards empowering communities with universal access to learning opportunities could become a cross-cutting theme in United Nations country programmes. These opportunities would take different forms in different countries determined by the country's own priorities and stage of development. A chapter on such a theme (for example, "People development for the information age") in the annual reports of the Resident Coordinator on progress with respect to United Nations reforms and operational activities could track progress. Success stories and best practices could be showcased during sessions of the General Assembly (perhaps in collaboration with the Global Knowledge Partnership). This approach would keep the Assembly informed and stimulate global awareness of the challenges and opportunities involved in harnessing ICT for accelerated human development and universal access to learning.

Notes

[1] Roger Maconick and Peter Morgan, eds., *Capacity-building Supported by the United Nations: Some Evaluations and Some Lessons* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.99.II.A.4).